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ABSTRACT

Library directors at 164 universities, colleges, and community colleges in California were surveyed in fall 1986 on their hiring of temporary librarians over 5 fiscal years, 1982-83 through 1986-87. The response rate was 90%. Results indicated that: (1) all types of academic libraries employ temporary librarians; (2) the number of temporary librarians is either holding steady or increasing, depending on the type of academic library; (3) the reasons for hiring temporary librarians differ depending on the type of academic library; and (4) most temporary librarians fill reference positions. This paper details the survey results, compares these figures to the national temporary marketplace, and comments on the impact of this personnel trend on library service. Graphs present data on the number of temporary librarians by type of library, percent of temporary librarians on staff by type of library, and types of positions filled by temporaries. (17 references) (Author/MES)

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TEMPORARY LIBRARIANS IN CALIFORNIA ACADEMIC LIBRARIES

Results of a State-wide Survey of Library Directors

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

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Library directors at California's universities, colleges, and community colleges were surveyed in Fall 1986 on their hiring of temporary librarians over five fiscal years; ninety percent responded. The results indicate: a) all types of academic libraries employ temporary librarians, b) the number of temporary librarians is either holding steady or increasing depending on the type of academic library, c) the reasons for hiring temporary librarians differ depending on the type of academic library, and d) most temporary librarians fill reference positions. This paper details the survey results, compares these figures to the national temporary marketplace, and comments on the impact of this personnel trend on library service.

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In September 1986, a questionnaire on the use of temporary librarians was mailed to library directors at 164 academic libraries in California -- the University of California System, the California State University system, private four-year colleges and universities, and community colleges. The 90% response rate was incredible, and it denotes an intense interest in the subject.

The responses to the questionnaire show that all types of academic libraries use temporary librarians, and the numbers have been increasing in past years. These professionals are not just substituting for permanent staff on sabbatical, maternity or sick leave. They are often hired in recurring temporary or contract slots instead of tenure-track or career positions. Numerous community college libraries are functioning with 40% of their professional staffs employed in temporary appointments. Most temporary librarians are hired in public service areas -- specifically reference. In short, temporary librarians play a significant role in the operation of today's academic libraries in California.

The use of temporary professionals in California academic libraries reflects the increased use of temporary employees throughout the United States. Employees hired through temporary service companies in the U. S. increased from 2.5 million in 1980 to 5 million in 1986.[1] Temporary employees recruited directly by their employers make the total number actually higher. The temporary services industry is one of the fastest growing in the country. During the last decade, the number of temporary employees has

grown about 18 - 20% annually. A continuing 5% annual growth rate is expected during the next ten years.[2]

The "Kelly Girl" image of the temporary services industry is obsolete.[3] Professionals such as lawyers, chemists, doctors, nurses, engineers, pharmacists, and even chief executive officers now represent 10-11% of temporary employees hired through temporary service companies[4]. The demand for temporary professionals is growing at approximately 10% per year.[5]

At America's colleges and universities, temporary teaching faculty have become commonplace. As in the general work force, the number of temporary or part-time faculty continues to rise. Thirty-four percent of faculty positions nationwide were occupied by temporary faculty in 1984 -- a 22% increase since 1970.[6] Fifty percent of the 65,000 faculty members in the University of California system, the California State University system, and California community colleges are employed on temporary status![7]

What is the situation for temporary academic librarians? James Chervinko surveyed 100 Academic and Research Libraries on the use of temporary workers. He concluded that temporary workers were involved with special library projects such as retrospective conversions, cataloging special collections, labeling and microfilming.[8] His data, however, do not include temporary professionals in academic libraries whose employment is vital to the day-to-day functioning of the library. Library and faculty organizations do not keep records on their numbers.[9] Many full-time and part-time reference, acquisition, cataloging, serials, and

government publications librarians are working in academic libraries with temporary or contract appointments.

This paper documents the use of temporary librarians in academic libraries based on the data generated by the questionnaire. Comments and questions on the impact and organizational issues concerning temporary employment are also addressed.

Methodology

Data were obtained from all types of academic libraries. The differences and the similarities between college and university libraries were of interest. Economic considerations precluded a nationwide survey; consequently, an exhaustive state-wide survey was conducted. The research project had three goals: 1) determine the employment trends and usage patterns of temporary librarians in California academic libraries; 2) explore the reasons for vacant positions which temporary librarians fill; and 3) determine the types of positions which temporary librarians hold.

The College Blue Book, 20th edition, was the source used to identify California private and public universities and colleges.[10] One of the aims of the project was to attempt to identify trends at "typical" colleges and universities. Therefore, the schools dedicated to only one discipline such as law, medicine, theology, photography, or mortuary science were excluded from the sample. The 1986 edition of California Library Statistics indicates that there are 184 academic libraries in California;[11] this figure does not count departmental libraries. The final list for the survey contained 164

of the 184 libraries due to the exclusion mentioned above. The breakdown was: 8 University of California campuses, 19 California State University campuses, 42 private colleges or universities, and 95 community colleges.

A questionnaire was sent to the library director at each of the schools in late September 1986. The first question asked if temporary librarians had ever been employed at the school; if so, an employment breakdown for fiscal years 1982/83 through 1986/87 was requested. The second question asked the number of permanent professionals employed over the same fiscal years for comparison purposes. Another question polled the library directors on the reason for the temporary position -- sabbatical or maternity leaves, special projects, or lack of permanent positions, for example. Information about the type of position such as reference, cataloging, or collection development was also sought. Finally, ample space was allotted for comments -- and many were provided!

Within one month of mailing, 109 questionnaires, or 66%, had already been returned. The total response rate for the first mailing was 73%. A second mailing to non-respondents was done at the beginning of 1987. An additional 27 library directors responded for a final response rate of 90%. The private schools had the highest response rate - 95%. Ninety percent of the community college library directors returned the questionnaire followed closely by the CSU schools at 89%. The response rate for the UC libraries was "only" 62%.

Results

Use of Temporary Librarians

Every type of academic library polled has hired temporary librarians in the past five fiscal years. Each (100%) of the responding UC and CSU libraries have hired temporary professionals. Likewise, twenty-two, or 56.4% of the responding private college and universities and 68.6% of the community college libraries stated they had employed temporary librarians. Seventy percent, or 103 out of the 147 responding libraries stated they had hired temporary professionals in the past five years.

The questionnaire obtained data on the employment of temporary librarians from Fiscal Year 1982/83 to Fiscal Year 1986/87. (Insert Figure 1) The California community colleges employ the largest number of temporary librarians and the University of California the fewest. More temporary professionals are hired in the CSU system than in the private colleges and universities. Figure 1 shows the employment totals for the five fiscal years for each type of library. An upward trend is noted. It is important to remember that the data provided for FY 86/87 was relatively early for most respondents; therefore, the actual totals for that year are, most likely, higher than those reflected in the graph. Over the first four fiscal years of the survey, the number of temporary librarians increased 128% in the UC system, 64% in the

CSU system, 80% in private institutions, and 37% in the community colleges.

Most libraries showed a gradual increase in their employment rate -- except the CSU. The CSU system's employment of temporary professionals almost doubled between FY 83/84 and FY 84/85. This surge probably reflected the state budget cuts which occurred due to the cumulative effects of Proposition 13. In FY 83/84, the State of California lowered library staffing formulas, and, because of the introduction of automated cataloging and circulation systems, further cut the number of library staff positions. At the same time, the State also increased the number of dollars available for temporary employees. Library directors in the CSU system hired temporary librarians to fulfill their staffing needs.

While the number of temporary librarians employed by California academic libraries is important, more significant is their fraction of the academic library work force. The survey requested an annual breakdown of the number of temporary librarians employed as well as the number of permanent librarians. (Insert Figure 2) Figure 2 shows the percentage of the total library professional staff which was temporarily employed by type of academic library. The UC campuses and the private colleges and universities held the fraction of temporary staff rather constant- 3% and 8.5% respectively. The CSU campuses, not surprisingly, showed an increase in this fraction -- approximately 7% in the early 1980's and about 12% recently. This rise was a reflection of the sudden increase in temporary employment noted in the previous section. The Community colleges had by far, the largest fraction of

temporary librarians on their staff - approximately 40%. This figure is triple the percentage for the CSU system, five times the rate at the private universities and ten times the level at the UC system.

(Insert Figure 3) Figure 3 provides the composite data. In FY 82/83 temporary librarians comprised 13.4% of California academic library professional staffs. By FY 85/86 the percentage had risen to 17.9%. Again, the FY 86/87 data was provided early in the year; therefore, it is likely that the actual percentage increased beyond the number reported.

Reasons for Hiring Temporary Librarians

The project sought not only employment trends, but also the reasons for the vacancy or need to hire another professional staff member. Analysis of these data was difficult due to variations in the interpretation of a question. Some respondents' answers did not match the figures they provided in an earlier question. Some respondents checked the appropriate reasons without supplying figures. Others appear to have neglected to count again temporary employees carried over from year to year. A few schools also used candidate pools so exact breakdowns were either unknown to the directors or too time consuming to reconstruct. It was decided, therefore, that every instance of at least one indication of a "hiring" reason by a responding library was counted. Consequently, the number of responding libraries citing a particular hiring reason is reported -- not the total number of temporary librarians hired for that reason.

Six categories were offered for hiring temporary librarians: (1) sabbatical leave replacement, (2) maternity leave, (3) extended sick leave, (4) unavailability of tenure/career positions, (5) special projects such as retrospective conversions, and (6) other. Three additional categories were formed from the respondents' answers in the "other" category: (7) administrative, (8) desk staffing needs, and (9) termination due to either resignation, termination, retirement, or death.

The reasons for hiring temporary librarians differ from system to system. (Insert Figure 4) Figure 4 (a-d) illustrates the data by type of academic library. In the UC system, the miscellaneous category "other" ranked first; special projects, sabbatical leave replacements, and sick leave were next, then maternity leave and administrative vacancies. The unavailability of career positions was never cited as a reason for hiring temporary professionals in the UC system.

California's community college libraries were much different. The majority of the responding community colleges stated they hired temporary librarians. Twenty-two hired temporary professionals because their university or library administrations would not fill the vacancy with a permanent appointment. Twenty-seven hired temporary professionals in order to keep the library open evenings and weekends when the permanent staff was not there. A comment from a community college library director further illustrates this situation:

> We rely heavily on our part-time temporary staff which is 50% of our total staff. One part-time temporary keeps the library open in the evening and has since 1983-84. The other two part-time temporaries assist with reference and collection development. One contract librarian was not replaced in 1981-82. We began using temporaries as crucial members of our staff since then. The college has promised to replace the contract librarian's position each year for the past five years. We are still waiting.

The unavailability of permanent positions ranked a close second for both the CSU system and private colleges and universities as the reason for employing temporary librarians. Eleven of the seventeen responding CSU libraries cited sabbatical replacement as a primary reason compared to eight who stated the lack of permanent slots was the justification for the temporary appointment. The "other" category was next in the CSU ranking followed by maternity leave, extended hours, administrative, sick leave, special projects, and termination. For private colleges, special projects was the most common reason for hiring temporary librarians followed by unavailability of permanent positions, sabbatical leave, maternity leave, administrative, extended hours, termination, "other" and sick leave.

The reasons for hiring temporary professionals are varied and depend on the type of academic institution. These data, though, refute the notion that temporary professionals merely replace absent staff members. On the contrary, temporary librarians are providing important staffing to academic libraries. Again, nowhere

is this point more dramatically indicated than in the community colleges.

Roles of Temporary Librarians in Academic Libraries

Although there was great variety in why temporary professionals were hired in the different types of academic libraries, there is uniformity in the types of positions temporary librarians fill. Reference librarians were, by far, the most frequently hired.

Directors were asked to indicate the different types of positions their temporary professionals filled such as reference, cataloging, circulation, government documents, acquisitions, collection development, media, periodicals, etc. There were some difficulties with the answers. Some respondents merely checked the different categories without specifying the number of temporary professionals in that category. Therefore the accompanying chart (Insert Figure 5) shows the relative frequencies that each category was cited by responding libraries -- not the number of temporary librarians filling that type of position.

As stated earlier, 103, or 70% of the responding libraries had hired temporary professionals. Of those 103 libraries, 83 or 80.5% filled reference positions with temporary librarians. The next highest category was cataloging; here, 26 or 25% of the libraries hired temporary cataloging librarians. The next largest category was "Other" -- these included a medical librarian, an archivist, and a conservationist. Although an actual count could not be calculated, it

was obvious from the responses that the majority of temporary librarians were indeed reference librarians. Figure 5 illustrates the composite data for this question. Again, the chart is based on the fraction of total responses in each category.

Comments from Respondents

The comments section of the survey suggested that respondents discuss the "advantages, problems, restrictions, expectations, and performance" of temporary librarians. The majority of library directors did offer comments.

Staffing flexibility and lower salaries were cited by the respondents as the main advantages of hiring temporary professionals. Budget and enrollment uncertainties encourage hiring temporary professionals instead of permanent staff members. Temporary librarians generally make less money and receive no fringe benefits; thus, their employment is a "budget savings" for the library or the university. In addition, they are often much easier to hire and fire -- again, an advantage if staffing needs change rapidly.

Numerous directors also stated that the use of temporary librarians at the Reference Desk "freed" the permanent staff to pursue other responsibilities such as bibliographic instruction, research, or university committees. Four or five respondents also indicated that the entire staff benefited from the "infusion" of fresh insights and energy from the temporary librarians.

The library directors also cited disadvantages to employing temporary professionals. Their three main disadvantages were: the

high cost of training versus the length of employment, the high turnover rate, and evaluation difficulties. Other problem areas mentioned were communication with temporary employees, lack of continuity in the staff, lack of professionalism, possible negative attitudes of temporary librarians, and limited areas of assignment.

Discussion

Several important facts have been brought forth by this survey. They are:

(1) All types of academic libraries in California use temporary librarians.

(2) The number of temporary academic librarians is either holding steady or increasing depending on the type of academic library.

(3) Most temporary librarians fill reference positions.

(4) For all types of academic libraries except community college libraries, the temporary staffing mean is 10%. Forty-three percent of community college librarians have temporary appointments.

(5) Sabbatical replacements, desk staffing needs, and the unavailability of permanent positions are the major reasons for hiring temporary librarians in all but the UC system. The hiring motivations on UC campuses are more varied.

(6) Administrators cite staffing flexibility and lower salaries as the main advantages for hiring temporary professionals. The high cost of training relative to the length of employment was the primary disadvantage cited.

The upward trend in the employment of temporary librarians in academic libraries is consistent with the increase of temporary employees in the general work force and teaching faculty at America's colleges and universities. This trend also parallels the increase of temporary employees in America's corporate marketplace. The lower salaries and staffing flexibility of temporary employees justify their use in both corporate America and academic libraries.[12]

The business literature shows that cost savings occur through the use of temporary employees -- primarily because benefits are frequently not paid.[13] The US Chamber of Commerce calculated that "on average, fringe benefits cost companies an additional 38% of employees salaries."[14] Academic libraries, like businesses, can improve staffing flexibility through the employment of temporary professionals rather than permanent librarians. More articles are appearing which report on the two-tiered or internal labor market. In an attempt to achieve efficiency and fiscal economy, more and more American companies are streamlining their personnel ranks; a core group of employees remain while particular services and processes are handled by outside firms or temporary employees.[16] Consequently, employees are becoming "head counts" at many corporations. One quality-control manager commented, "The standing joke is that the objective around here is to run the company without any people."[17] In short, the advantages of hiring temporary employees, like temporary librarians, are unlikely to disappear soon;

therefore, the ranks of temporary librarians will most likely continue to grow in the years ahead.

Conclusion

This research project has documented the increasing use of temporary professionals in California's academic libraries and the reasons these staff members are hired. The employment of temporary professionals provides library administrators with personnel staffing alternatives. While the monetary savings resulting from employing temporary librarians may be a plus on a budget sheet, libraries may be paying a price in service, staff morale, and other less tangible areas. It may be fine to substitute for a receptionist or a chemist in a particular institution. But reference service may decline when temporary librarians predominantly staff the reference desk in order to free the permanent staff for other responsibilities.

Many reference questions pertain to local issues such as directions, campus offices, procedures, or policies. A temporary librarian, through no lack of his/her professional training, experience, or commitment, will not necessarily field these types of questions as well as a person who has been on the staff for a number of years. Also, reference collections cannot be thoroughly learned in a few weeks or months.

Questions on reference service cannot be easily dismissed. The vast majority of temporary librarians are working at the Reference Desk -- the common access point for patrons and their

service. Overuse of temporary professionals may exacerbate the "crisis" in reference service accuracy documented in two recent books by Hernon and McClure[18] and Powell and Benham[19].

Hiring temporary librarians affects not only the patrons but also the library staff. Group cohesiveness may have more impact on a library staff than in some other institutional settings. Teamwork is essential in a library, and it takes time to develop a team-like atmosphere among people. It is difficult to cultivate this type of atmosphere when a segment of the group is in a state of flux.

It is too early to determine the propriety of the current level of temporary librarian use in California's academic libraries. In that regard, the results of this survey provide a baseline for comparison in future years. It appears, however, that the use of temporary librarians may be reaching inappropriate levels in the community colleges. Hiring temporary professionals to fill certain types of staff vacancies, such as sabbatical leaves, can be an intelligent administrative decision. So far, hiring temporary librarians has been an effective response to the challenge of declining budgets. As one library director wrote, "Our real problem is not enough librarians of any kind, permanent or temporary, full or part-time." But reliance on temporary professionals to fulfill general staffing needs may prove detrimental for long-term library service.

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FIGURE 1

THE NUMBER OF TEMPORARY LIBRARIANS EMPLOYED

BY TYPE OF ACADEMIC LIBRARY

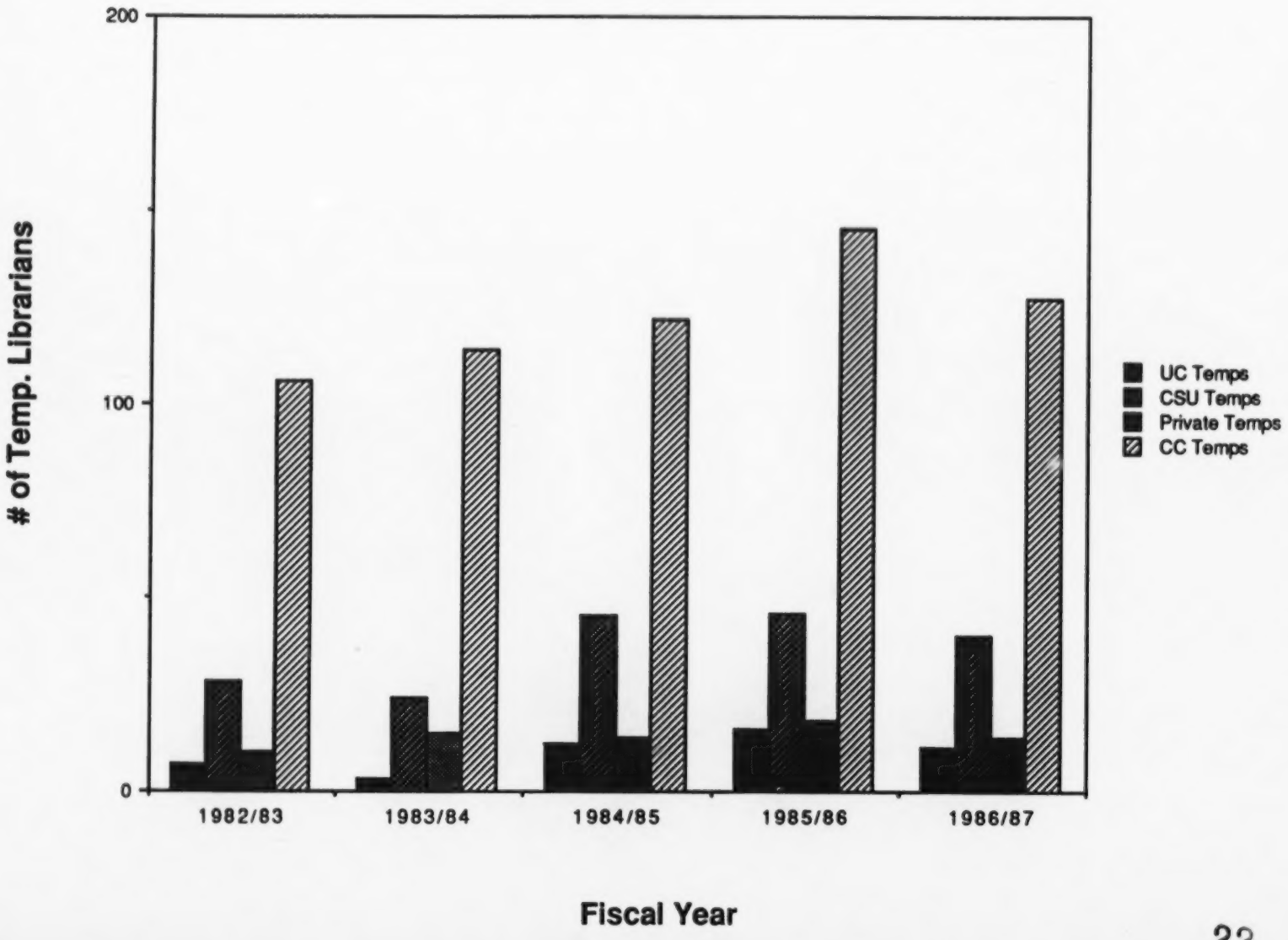


FIGURE 2

PERCENTAGE OF TEMPORARY LIBRARIANS ON STAFFS

BY TYPE OF CALIFORNIA ACADEMIC LIBRARY

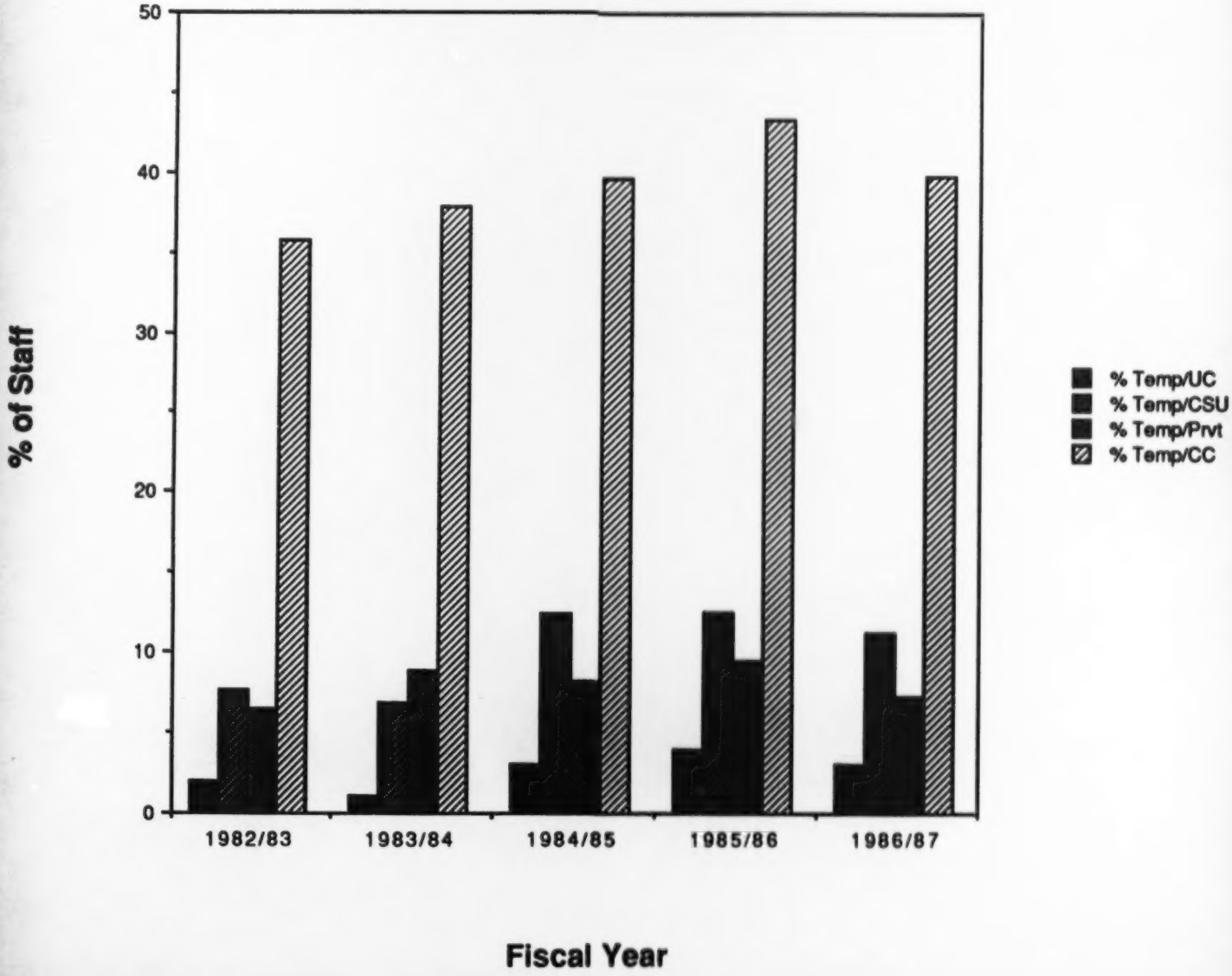


FIGURE 3

PERCENTAGE OF TEMPORARY LIBRARIANS ON STAFFS

BY TYPE OF CALIFORNIA ACADEMIC LIBRARY

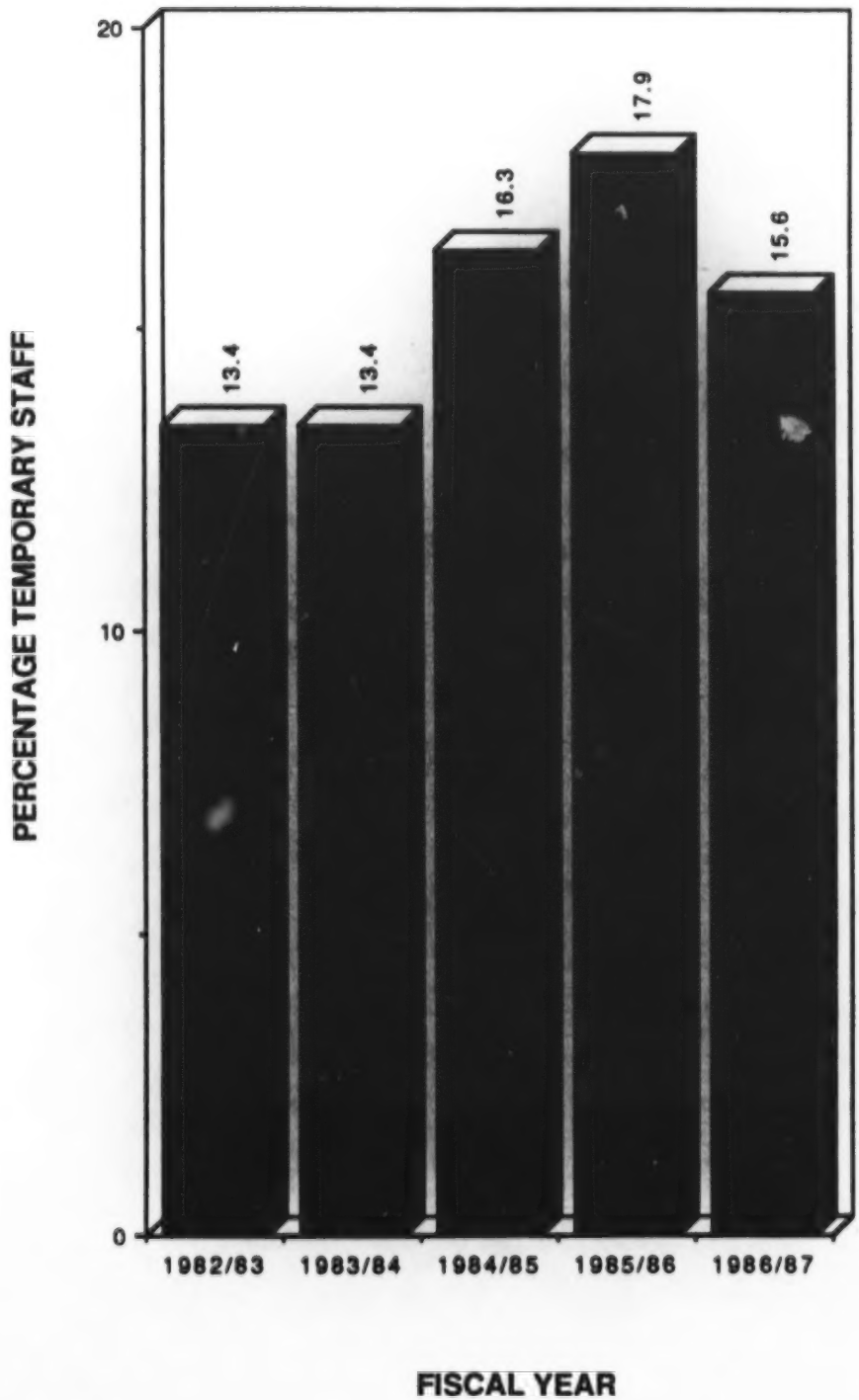
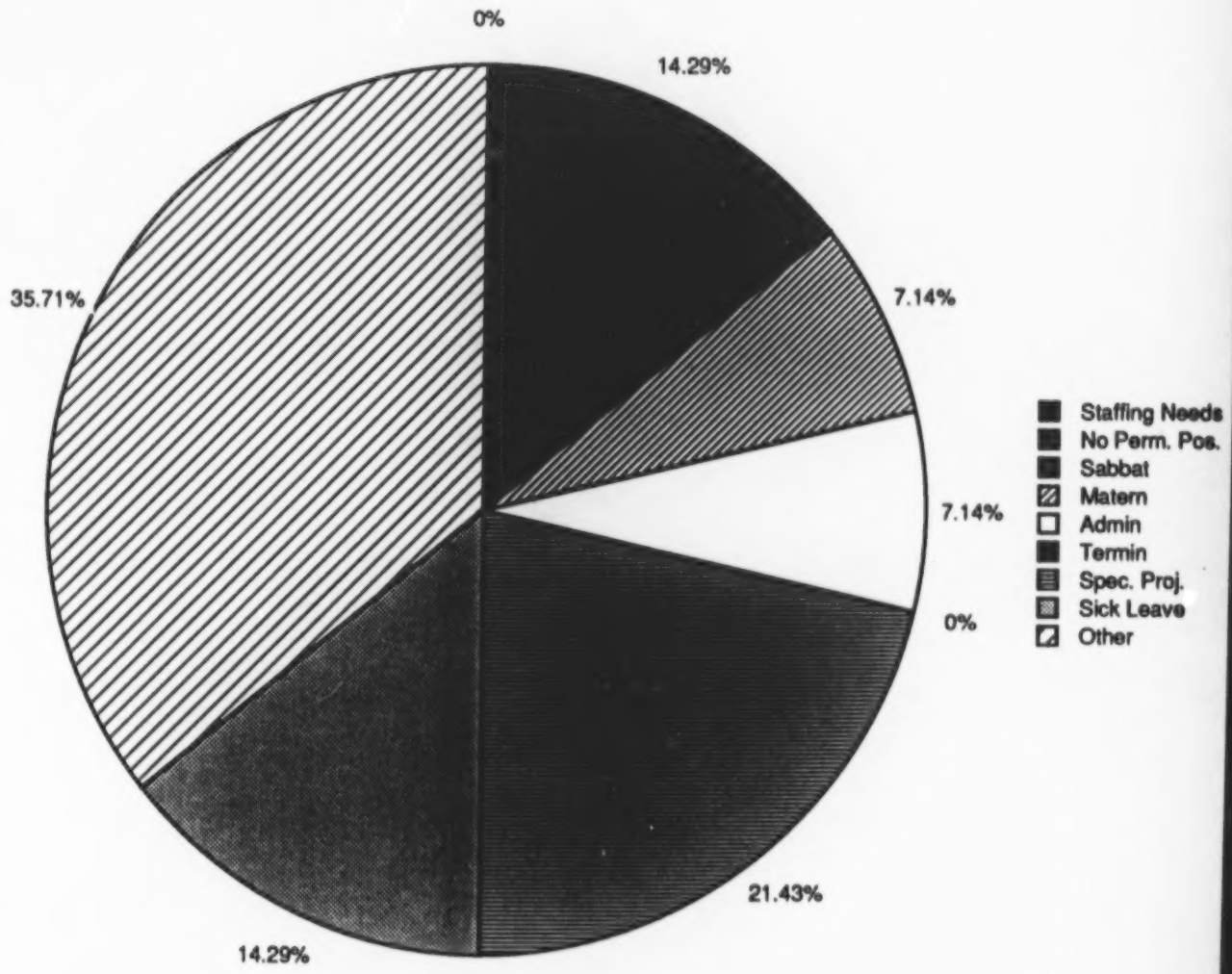
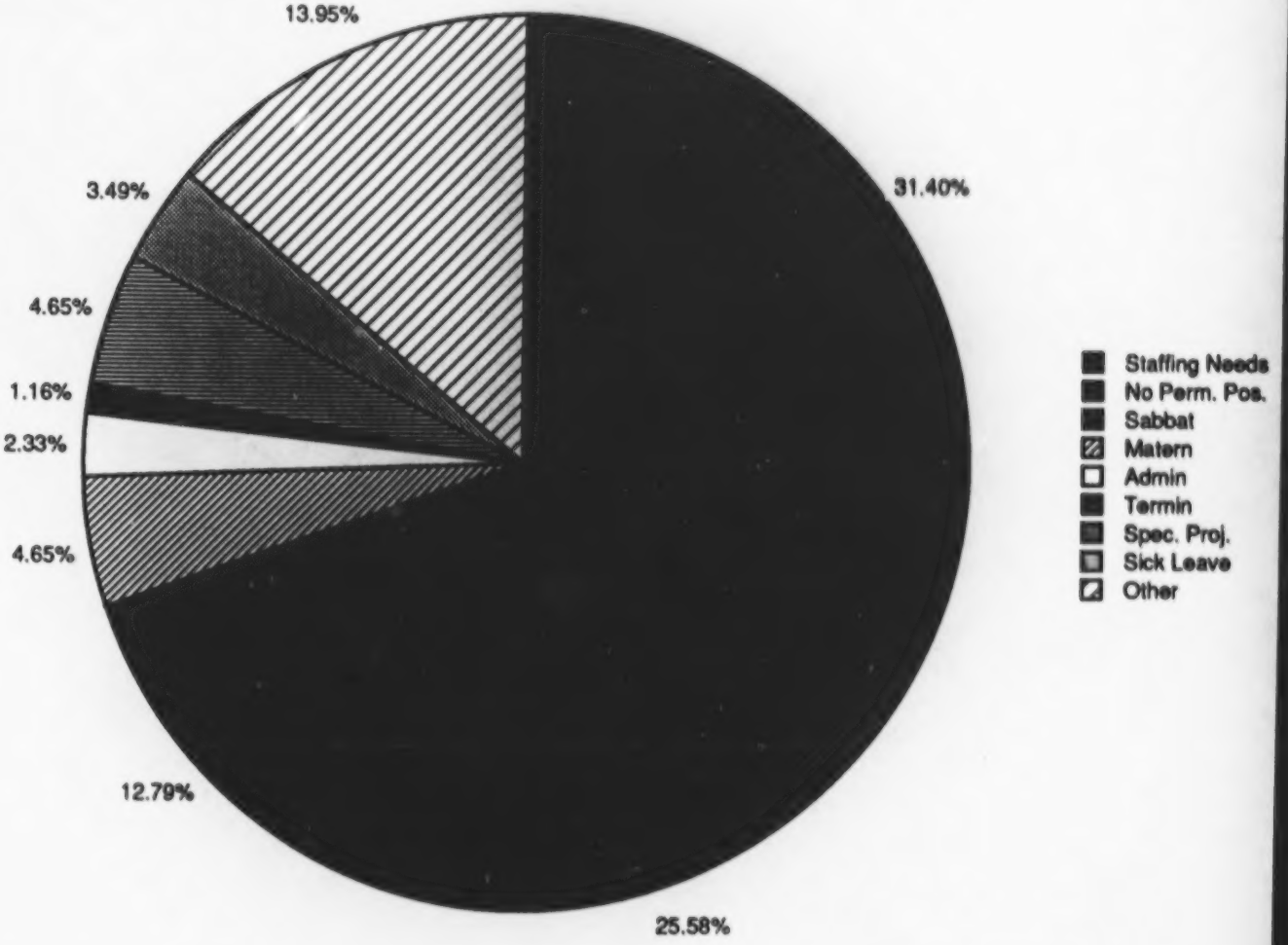


FIGURE 4 [a]

REASONS FOR HIRING TEMPORARY LIBRARIANS

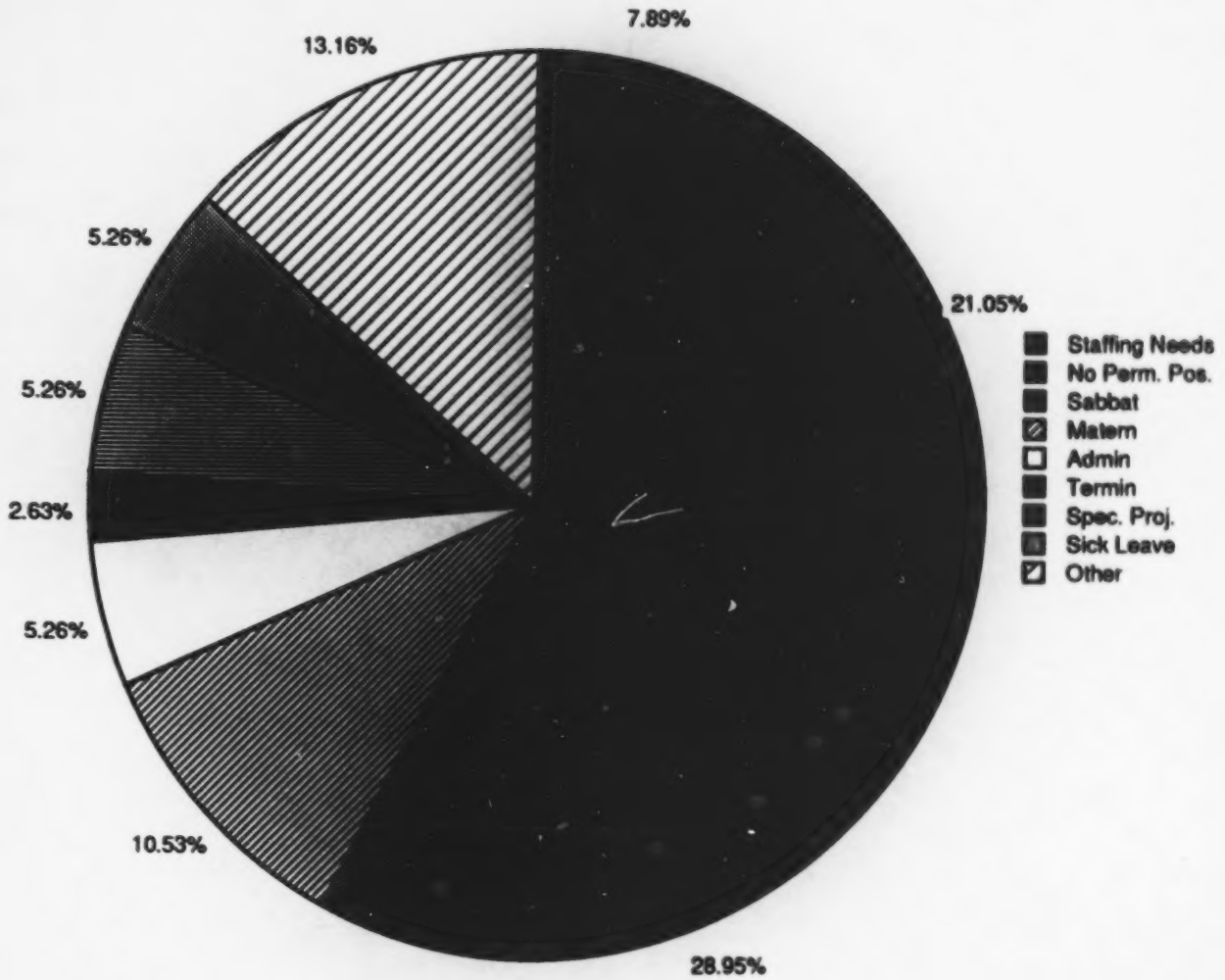


FIGURES 4-b



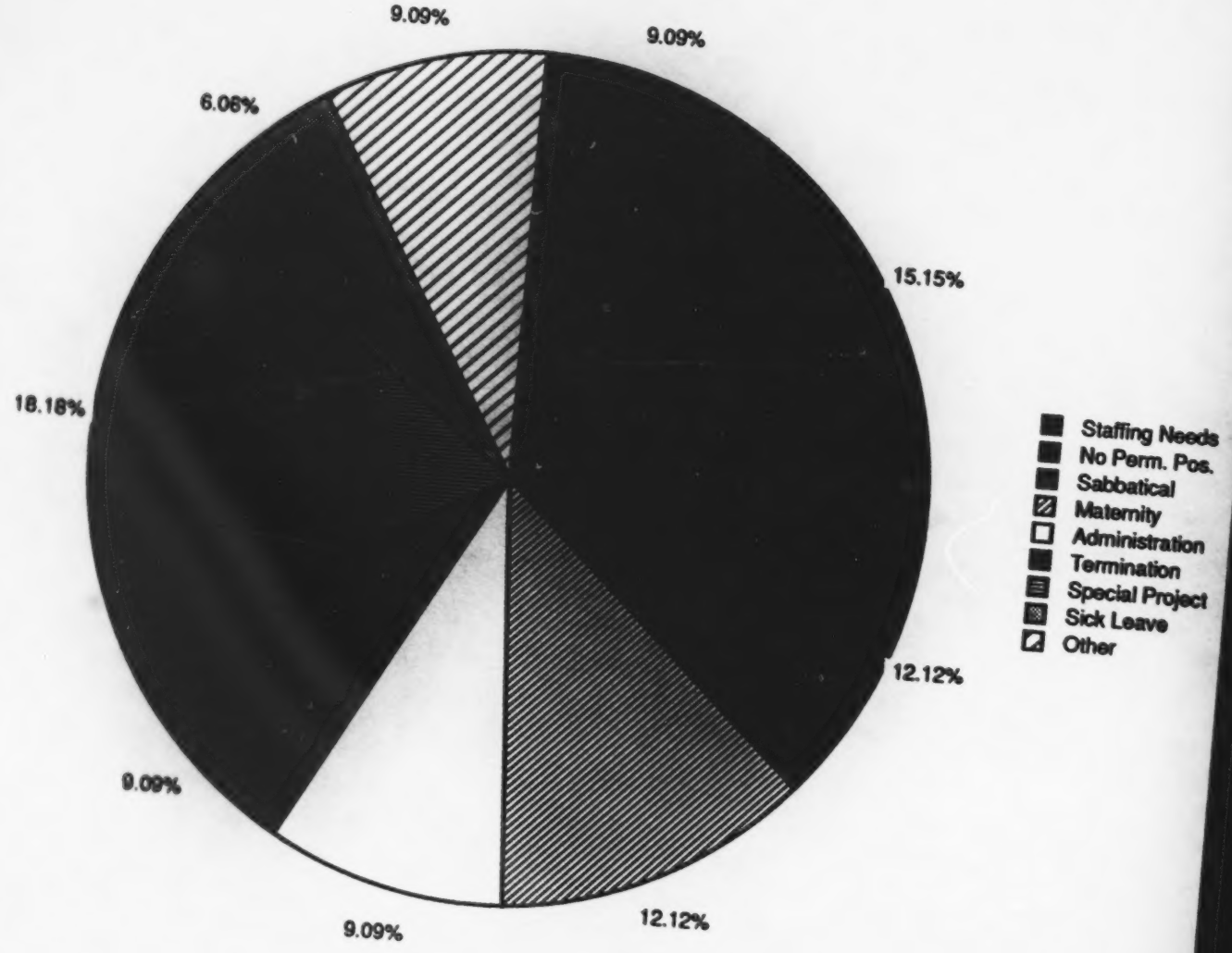
Community Colleges

FIGURES 4C



California State University

FIGURES 4



Private Colleges

FIGURE 5

TYPES OF POSITIONS FILLED BY TEMPORARY LIBRARIANS